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[R81]

VI

UNRRA and Foreign Relief

THE most urgent economic problem in Austria after the War was the lack of food. It was a problem that could not be dealt with adequately by the first-aid measures that have been described. The assistance given by the occupying Powers in the summer and autumn of 1945 led to a temporary rise in the ration scale, but in the spring of the following year the situation deteriorated. The normal consumer's ration was reduced during March to a theoretical level of 1,200 calories a day. In Vienna during May it amounted in practice to only 950 calories; 'too many to cause death and too few to sustain life', as one member of Parliament put it.

In October 1946 the Federal Chancellor stated in Parliament that Austria had the lowest rations of any country in Europe. According to the official history of UNRRA, Austria had a lower calorie level than any other country in receipt of UNRRA aid. What strained the patience of the Austrian people most severely was an announcement by the occupying Powers in Germany of a higher ration for the ex-enemy country. When this news was made known, food riots broke out in Vienna, and popular indignation was so strong that in November the Austrian Government announced a similar ration of 1,550 calories for Austria. It did so without the approval of the Allied Council and without consultation with UNRRA. There was therefore no guarantee that the necessary supplies would be forthcoming. But the combined efforts of UNRRA and the Governments of the United States and the United Kingdom were equal to the challenge.

The effects of the low calories scale were made worse by the nature of the rations available. They were particularly deficient in fat, animal protein, calcium, and certain vitamins. For two

[Cf. category 116, p.20 — Analyst]

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146 434 511 to three months during 1945 in Vienna milk could only be provided for infants in arms and the seriously ill. It was only by gradual and progressive stages that the supply could be organized for children between one and twelve years of age. At the worst period only about 5,000 litres a day were being distributed in the capital, whereas the normal daily consumption in 1952 was approximately 700,000 litres.

[165] The infant mortality and tuberculosis rates in Vienna show the results of under-nourishment. For every thousand live births the mortality rate amongst infants was 191 in 1945, as opposed to 53 in 1938. New cases of tuberculosis numbered 2·87 a thousand in 1946 compared with 1·11 in 1940. The tuberculosis death-rate for the first half of 1946 was nearly double the pre-War figures and about three times as high as in Britain.

The food situation naturally varied a great deal between the country and the towns. In most parts of Austria there was little real shortage on the land, and the consumption of those engaged in food production probably averaged about 3,000 calories a day. In the small country towns, from which access to the farms was easy, official rations could usually be supplemented. It was in the large towns, above all in Vienna, that the position was very serious.

The emergency was aggravated and prolonged by the requirements of the refugees and displaced persons. The return of hundreds of thousands of Austrian prisoners of war during 1945 and 1946 also increased the scale of the problem.

434 511 One of the worst features of the whole situation in Vienna was the acute shortage of fuel that accompanied the meagre rations. Gas and electricity were severely rationed, and the supply of both was unreliable and limited to a few hours a day. Fuel of all kinds, whether coal, coke, wood, or oil, for the average person was almost unobtainable. The official ration of coal per household during the winter of 1947–8 was 300 kilograms, and even this quite inadequate amount could not be 511 delivered in full. Yet a great many rooms in the city had broken windows, and glass was in very short supply and

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were a pre-condition for the purchase of food from abroad, and undernourishment stood in the way of industrial recovery.

The food problem remained serious for at least three years. In 1947 it was often found impossible to honour the inadequate basic ration scales of 1,500 to 1,600 calories, and medical inspections established that nearly 50 per cent of Viennese school children were under-nourished. Until 1948, when Austria had its first good post-War harvest, the population as a whole remained noticeably under-fed. By then most people's savings had already been spent and their mental and physical powers of resistance had been seriously weakened.

In spite of this melancholy story, great efforts were made to deal with the situation. Had this not been the case, the prolonged deprivation and distress of the Austrian people would have ended inevitably in political disaster.

In the autumn of 1945 it was decided to invite the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration to organize a supply programme for Austria. The way had been prepared in August, when the UNRRA Council had decided that as Austria was a liberated country there was nothing to prevent relief and rehabilitation operations being undertaken there, provided the occupying Powers approved. At the time, however, the necessary funds were not available. In November the immediate initiation of an UNRRA programme was urged, particularly by the United Kingdom, and before the end of the month an UNRRA Working Party had arrived in Vienna to obtain preliminary information regarding requirements. In December UNRRA headquarters, following a request from the Allied Council, authorized negotiations for an agreement with the Austrian Government, subject to the Council's approval. Brigadier R. H. R. Parminter, who had been serving since September as chief of the UNRRA Displaced Persons Operations in Austria, took over the duties of Chief of Mission on the 1st of January 1946 and conducted the negotiations. An UNRRA Bureau was set up in the Austrian Federal Chancellery early in the New Year to co-ordinate the transport, administration, and distribution of UNRRA supplies. On the

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was raised successively to 1,600 and 1,700 calories a day. In June 1948 it went up to 1,800, and the following September to 2,100. Between December 1947 and December 1948 black-market food prices fell from 64 per cent to 15 per cent of the figures for January 1946. This meant that it was at last reasonable to devote a smaller proportion of foreign aid to foodstuffs and a greater amount to economic rehabilitation. Of the £8,500,000 provided by Britain, less than £1,500,000 was spent on food, about the same amount on agriculture, £2 million on coal, and over £3 million on the most urgent industrial needs. Of the American Congress aid allocated for the first half of 1948 just under 60 per cent was devoted to food and just under 40 per cent to agriculture and coal, which was of such vital importance to industry.

The administrative responsibilities of the British and Americans in Austria made them highly sensitive to the country's needs. In spite of the obvious drawbacks of the occupation, there were certain advantages for Austria during the first precarious post-War years in the presence of the Western Allies on her territory. Without them the process of rebuilding the administration and economy after the collapse of the Nazi system would almost certainly have been accompanied by even more acute material shortages than those that were actually experienced.

Though the Austrian basic ration did not rise above 1,600 calories a day until November 1947, the minimum physiological needs of the normal consumer have been estimated at 2,160 calories. It might have been expected, therefore, that the results of so long a period of under-nourishment after the strain of the War would have been far worse than they actually were. One reason why they were not has already been mentioned: a large number of people resorted to the black market. But there were two other explanations.

During 1947 there were approximately 5 million Austrians in the rationed, as opposed to the self-supplying, category. Of these only about 2 million were normal consumers in receipt of basic rations. All the rest, either as employees, workers,

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heavy workers, children, or nursing and expectant mothers, were entitled to additional or special rations. Children had less calories, but received a special allocation of milk. In the case of employees the addition was small, but for workers of all categories and for nursing and expectant mothers it was considerable, though the minimum requirements were correspondingly greater.

The second explanation was the widespread and well-organized relief work undertaken by a large number of foreign organizations, mostly on a private and voluntary basis.

Of the countries that had themselves been engaged in the War, the United States and Britain took the lead in providing voluntary relief for Austria. By the beginning of 1947 a group of British societies, pooling their resources and working with the British Red Cross, had, together with the Irish Red Cross, delivered over 5,000 tons of food, 400 tons of medical supplies, and forty tons of clothing to Austria. During the summer of 1946 the British Forces in Austria organized a highly successful Searchlight Tattoo, the proceeds of which, amounting to 400,000 Austrian schillings, were handed over to the mayor of Vienna for the benefit of the children of the city. By the beginning of 1947 various American charitable organizations had delivered to Austria over 9,500 tons of food and 320 tons of clothing. A large-scale relief scheme had been organized, known as the Co-operative American Remittances to Europe, which was happily abbreviated to the word CARE. Throughout the post-War years the arrival of large food parcels, known as CARE packets, was a cause of much happiness and gratitude amongst a great many individuals and institutions in Austria. The Quakers of both countries, in addition to distributing food and clothing, made a special contribution by organizing holiday homes for young people.

Of the neutral countries, Switzerland and the Scandinavian nations made the outstanding contributions.

The first help from Switzerland arrived in the Tyrol and the Vorarlberg as early as May 1945, and by November provisions and medical supplies had begun to reach Vienna. During the